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Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San Jose, Costa Rica

DISASTER RESPONSE

U.S. Private Sector in Brazil Aids Flood-Affected Communities

USAID/OFDA and dozens of U.S. companies doing business in Brazil have teamed up to bring relief supplies to families affected by floods and mudslides caused by heavy rainfall in late November and early December.

The floods affected 1.5 million people in at least 60 cities and towns, destroyed infrastructure throughout the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Santa Catarina, and resulted in the deaths of more than 130 people with dozens of others reported missing.

USAID/OFDA deployed an assessment team to Santa Catarina, the hardest hit state, and provided \$100,000 to implementing partner Catholic Relief Services for the local procurement and distribution of emergency relief supplies for affected populations.

In addition, more than two dozen U.S. companies contributed to the relief effort, including in-kind and cash donations, logistical support for the delivery of relief supplies, and employee collection campaigns. Most of the contributions were provided by members of the U.S. Embassy's corporate social responsibility program in Brazil. The network, called Mais Unidos, was established two years ago.



Photo courtesy of Pfizer

Pfizer donated medicine to Civil Defense and local hospitals in Santa Catarina as part of the relief efforts following severe floods in Brazil.

Walmart and USAID/OFDA took the lead in coordinating the communication and assistance of the Mais Unidos members. This ensured that the state's needs were well-known and that emergency supplies were delivered to appropriate communities.

"This certainly is one of the more successful private sector activities that I know of, at least from a cost-benefit standpoint," commented USAID/OFDA regional advisor Phil Gelman.

The Mais Unidos members that contributed to the relief effort in Santa Catarina include 3M do Brasil, Accenture, Alcoa Foundation, Bungue, Cargill, Caterpillar, Cummins, Dell, El Paso, Eli Lilly, FedEx, Ford, General Motors, IBM, Ketchum, Kimberly-Clark, Kodak, Kraft, Merck Sharpe & Dohme, Microsoft, Monsanto, Motorola, Pfizer, Proctor & Gamble, Rigesa, Unilever, Coca-Cola (through Vonpar), and Walmart.

DISASTER RESPONSE

Funds Provided to Colombia after Floods

USAID/OFDA has provided \$175,000 in response to recent floods in Colombia. Heavy seasonal rains since late November caused severe flooding in northwestern Colombia, most notably in the departments of Bolivar, Chocó, Magdalena, Sucre, and Córdoba. By early January, flooding had affected approximately 1.2 million people and damaged or destroyed more than 95,000 houses.

USAID/OFDA provided the funds to the Red Cross for the local purchase and distribution of relief supplies such as hygiene kits, blankets, mosquito nets, and plastic sheeting for shelters.

DISASTER RESPONSE

U.S. Assists Operations after Costa Rican Earthquake



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy

Following the 6.2 magnitude earthquake that struck Costa Rica on January 8, U.S. military and USAID/OFDA-contracted helicopters helped support Costa Rican air operations to evacuate hundreds of residents and tourists from isolated areas near the quake's mountainous epicenter, located 10 km east of Poas Volcano. The earthquake has killed 23 people, with eight others missing, damaged 26 km of road, and destroyed eight bridges.

COMING UP

LAC Region Strategy Workshop

USAID/OFDA/LAC is hosting a strategy workshop at the regional office the week of January 12. USAID/OFDA staff from Washington, D.C. and the regional office are attending.

New Disaster Management Expert in Haiti

On January 19, disaster management specialist Rose Luce Cadot-Prevot begins working as the new USAID/OFDA consultant for Haiti.

Quarterly Meeting with FIU Staff

On January 20, USAID/OFDA regional office staff will meet with representatives from Florida International University (FIU) to review progress made under a new five-year cooperative agreement to stimulate new disaster risk reduction activities and strengthen existing programs in the region.

Mexico Program Planning Meeting

On January 22, USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor Tim Callaghan and regional advisor Rene Carrillo will meet with the USAID/Mexico mission disaster relief officer and Government of Mexico officials to discuss the ongoing disaster management training and technical assistance program in Mexico.

Haiti Program Planning Meeting

From January 26-30, USAID/OFDA staff and representatives from the International Resources Group (IRG), which implements the USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program in LAC, will meet to discuss details of the new training and technical assistance program in Haiti.

Tsunami Early Warning System Meeting

USAID/OFDA will participate in the Third Project Steering Committee Meeting of the Earthquake Readiness Capacity Building Project, the Enhancing the Effectiveness of Information and Communications Technology Applications and Tools for Disaster Management in the Caribbean Region Project, and the Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System Project, to be held on January 27 in Barbados.

MOU with State of Sao Paulo, Brazil

Representatives of USAID/OFDA will travel to Brazil in early February to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with emergency officials from the state of Sao Paulo. The MOU will increase cooperation between Sao Paulo and USAID/OFDA, particularly in the provision of disaster management instructors, materials, and technical assistance for training activities.

INSARAG Americas Committee Meeting

Representatives of USAID/OFDA will participate in the next meeting of the Advisory Committee of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), Regional Group for the Americas, to be held February 12-13 in Panama. The Advisory Committee will review the INSARAG Americas annual work plan and assign tasks to committee members.

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DISASTER ASSISTANCE



USAID/OFDA disaster management specialist Beryl Armbrister, left, helps distribute USAID/OFDA relief supplies with Red Cross personnel in Belize in 2007.

Below, specialist Fernando Calderón distributes supplies in Honduras in 2008.

Photo by Eduardo Gutierrez, USAID/OFDA

Regional Disaster Assistance Program

Established in 1989, the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) is the primary vehicle for USAID/OFDA's support of disaster risk management in the LAC region. Over the years, given the increased capacity of LAC countries, USAID/OFDA has shifted from a strictly instructional approach to providing more technical assistance for planning, strengthening, and centralizing the role of national organizations in disaster management. The RDAP, implemented since 1998 by IRG, is overseen by USAID/OFDA's team of five regional advisors based in San José, Costa Rica, and a consultant network of 22 disaster management specialists located throughout the region. USAID/OFDA regional advisors and consultants are available for immediate deployment to conduct damage and needs assessments in response to disasters and to help coordinate response activities, if required.

Following is a list of the disaster management specialists and their assigned countries:

Fabián Arellano: Technical director of the regional program.

CARIBBEAN

Beryl Armbrister: Bahamas, St. Lucia, St. Kitts Nevis, Belize
Clive Lorde: Barbados, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago

Rose Luce Cadot-Prevot: Haiti (with Lilliana Etchebarne providing technical support to the training project)

Audrey Mullings: Jamaica, Granada

Cecil Shillingford: Dominica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Antigua & Barbuda

MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Pedro Soto: Mexico

Ricardo Berganza: Guatemala

Fernando Calderón: Costa Rica, Honduras

Sergio Gutiérrez: El Salvador, Nicaragua

Manuel Santana: Panama, Dominican Republic, Venezuela

SOUTH AMERICA

Juan Carlos Lobo: Colombia

Michael Camchong: Ecuador

Carlos Córdova: Bolivia, Paraguay

Jorge Grande: Argentina

Miguel Palmieri: Chile

Antonio Pinheiro: Brazil

José Stevenazzi: Uruguay

Dante Torres: Peru



Photo by William Brands, USAID/OFDA

LAC REGION

Luisa Alfaro: Fire management, incident command system (ICS) training in Central America and Mexico

Manuel Ramírez: Disaster risk management education (pre-school through university levels)

Santiago Baltodano: Pre-hospital care, ICS training in South America